

Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic water, gas, electricity or phone were cut off. Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away.



Families can and do cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team. By developing a family disaster plan and knowing what to do in a disaster is your best protection.

The following information is provided by your American Red Cross

4 Steps to Safety

Find Out What Could Happen To You

Contact your local emergency management office or your local ARC chapter and ask:

- * What types of disasters are most likely to happen in your area?
- * What are your communities warning signals?
- * What care is offered for animals after a disaster?
- * What help is there for elderly and disabled, if needed?

Create a Disaster Plan

Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire and severe weather to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work as a team.

- * Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen and explain what to do in each case.
- * Pick two places to meet. One, right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, such as a fire. Two, outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.
- * Ask an out-of-state friend to be your family contact. After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact's name and phone number.
- * Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.

Complete This Checklist

- * Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.)
- * Teach children how and when to call 911 for emergency help.
- * Show each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas and electricity at the main switches.
- * Check to see if you have adequate insurance coverage.
- * Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguishers and show them where they are located.
- * Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms
- * Conduct a home hazard hunt.
- * Determine the best escape routes from your home.
- * Find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster.

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Practice and Maintain Your Plan

- * Quiz your family every six months so they remember what to do.
- * Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills
- * Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturers instructions.
- * Test your smoke detectors monthly

Emergency Supplies

Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days. Assemble a Disaster Supply Kit with items you may need in an evacuation. Store these supplies in sturdy, Easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffle bags or covered trash containers.

Include such items as:

- * A three-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil.
- * One change of clothing and footwear and one blanket per person.
- * A first aid kit that includes your family's prescription medications.
- * Emergency tools including a battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- * An extra set of car keys and a credit card, cash or traveler's checks.
- * Sanitation supplies.
- * Special items for infants, elderly or disabled family members.
- * An extra pair of glasses
- * Keep important family documents in a waterproof container.

Keep a smaller kit in the trunk of your car.

Utilities

Locate the main electric fuse box, water service main and natural gas main. Learn how and when to turn these utilities off. Teach all responsible family members. Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves.

Remember, turn off the utilities only if you suspect the lines are damaged or if you are instructed to do so. If you turn the gas off, you will need a professional to turn it back on.

Evacuation

- * Evacuate immediately if told to do so
- * Listen to your battery-powered radio and follow the instructions of local emergency officials
- * Wear protective clothing and sturdy shoes
- * Take your Disaster Supply Kit
- * Lock your home
- * Use travel routes specified by local authorities. Don't use shortcuts
- * If you have time, shut off water, gas and electricity before leaving so
- * Make arrangements for your pets.

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